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Let there be light!

THE SHADOWY WATERS

THE SHADOWY WATERS

BY W. B. YEATS

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MAIN

TO LADY GREGORY

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I walked among the seven woods of Coole,
Shan-walla, where a willow-bordered pond
Gathers the wild duck from the winter dawn;
Shady Kyle-dortha; sunnier Kyle-na-gno
Where many hundred squirrels are as happy
As though they had been hidden by green boughs
Where old age cannot find them; Pairc-na-lea,
Where hazel and ash and privet blind the paths;
Dim Pairc-na-carraig, where the wild bees fling
Their sudden fragrances on the green air;
Dim Pairc-na-tarav, where enchanted eyes
Have seen immortal, mild, proud shadows walk;
Dim Inchy wood, that hides badger and fox
And martin-cat, and borders that old wood
Wise Biddy Early called the wicked wood:
Seven odours, seven murmurs, seven woods.

I had not eyes like those enchanted eyes,
Yet dreamed that beings happier than men
Moved round me in the shadows, and at night
My dreams were cloven by voices and by fires;
And the images I have woven in this story
Of Forgael and Dectora and the empty waters
Moved round me in the voices and the fires;
And more I may not write of, for them that cleave
The waters of sleep can make a chattering tongue
Heavy like stone, their wisdom being half silence.

How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud
shadows?
I only know that all we know comes from you,
And that you come from Eden on flying feet.
Is Eden far away, or do you hide
From human thought, as hares and mice and coneys
That run before the reaping-hook and lie

In the last ridge of the barley? Do our woods
And winds and ponds cover more quiet woods,
More shining winds, more star-glimmering ponds?

Is Eden out of time and out of space?
And do you gather about us when pale light
Shining on water and fallen among leaves,
And winds blowing from flowers, and whirr of
feathers
And the green quiet, have uplifted the heart?

I have made this poem for you, that men may
read it
Before they read of Forgael and Dectora,
As men in the old times, before the harps began,
Poured out wine for the high invisible ones.

September 1900.

THE SHADOWY WATERS

FORGAEL

AIBRIC

DECTORA

SAILORS

THE deck of a galley. The steering-oar, which comes through the bulwark, is to the left hand. One looks along the deck toward the high forecastle, which is partly hidden by a great square sail. The sail is drawn in toward the stern at the left side, and is high enough above the deck at the right side to show a little of the deck beyond and of the forecastle. Three rows of hounds, the first dark, the second red, and the third white with red ears, make a conventional pattern upon the sail. The sea is hidden in mist, ana there is no light except where the moon makes a brightness in the mist.

FORGAEL *is sleeping upon skins a few yards forward of the steering-oar. He has a silver lily embroidered over his breast. A small harp lies beside him.* AIBRIC *and two sailors stand about the steering-oar. One of the sailors is steering.*

THE HELMSMAN

His face has never gladdened since he came
Out of that island where the fool of the wood
Played on his harp.

THE OTHER SAILOR

And I would be as sad
But that the wind changed ; for I followed him
And heard the music in the wind, and saw
A red hound running from a silver arrow.
I drew my sword to fling it in a pool,—
I have forgotten wherefore.

THE HELMSMAN

The red hound
Was Forgael's courage that the music killed.

THE OTHER SAILOR

How many moons have died from the full moon
When something that was bearded like a goat
Walked on the waters and bid Forgael seek
His heart's desire where the world dwindles out?

THE HELMSMAN

Nine moons.

THE OTHER SAILOR

And from the harping of the fool?

THE HELMSMAN

Three moons.

THE OTHER SAILOR

It were best to kill him, and choose out
Another leader, and turn home again.

THE HELMSMAN

I had killed him long ago, but that the fool
Gave him his harp.

THE OTHER SAILOR

Now that he is asleep,

He cannot wake the god that hides in it.

(*The two sailors go nearer to* FORGAEL *and half draw their swords.*)

AIBRIC

And whom will you make leader? Who will make
A path among these waves and weigh the wind?
Not I, nor Maine there, nor Duach's son.
Be patient yet a while; for this ninth moon,
Being the moon of birth, may end our doubt.

(FORGAEL *rises. The two sailors hurry past him, and disappear beyond the sail.* FORGAEL *takes the steering-oar.*)

FORGAEL

So these would have killed Forgael while asleep
Because a god has made him wise with dreams;
And you, my Aibric, who have been a King
And spoken in the Council, and heard tales

That druids write on yew and apple wood,
Are doubtful like these pullers of the oar !

AIBRIC

I doubt your wisdom, but do not doubt my love.
Had I not gold and silver, and enough
Of pasture-land and plough-land among the hills ?
And when you came, the North under your sails,
And praised your war among the endless seas,
Did I not follow with a score of ships ?
And now they are all gone, I follow still.

FORGAEL

But would turn home again.

AIBRIC

No man had doubts
When we rowed north, singing above the oars,

And harried Alban towns, and overthrew
The women-slingers on the Narrow Bridge,
And passed the Outer Hebrides, and took
Armlets of gold or shields with golden nails
From hilly Lochlann ; but our sail has passed
Even the wandering islands of the gods,
And hears the roar of the streams where, druids say,
Time and the world and all things dwindle out.

FORGAEL

Do you remember, Aibric, how you bore
A captive woman from the Narrow Bridge,
And, though you loved her, gave her up to me?

AIBRIC

I thought she loved you, and I thought her love
Would overcome your sorrow and your dreams.
But you grew weary of her.

FORGAEL

When I hold
A woman in my arms, she sinks away
As though the waters had flowed up between;
And yet, there is a love that the gods give,
When Aengus and his Edaine wake from sleep
And gaze on one another through our eyes,
And turn brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness to the soft fire
That shall burn time when times have ebbed away.
The fool foretold me I would find this love
Among those streams, or on their cloudy edge.

AIBRIC

No man nor woman has loved otherwise
Than in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness; and he who longs

For happier love but finds unhappiness,
And falls among the dreams the drowsy gods
Breathe on the burnished mirror of the world
And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh.
Forgael, seek out content, where other men
Have found delight, in the resounding oars,
In day out-living battle, on the breast
Of some mild woman, or in children's ways.

FORGAEL

The fool that came out of the wintry wood
Taught me wise music, and gave me this old harp;
And were all dreams, it would not weigh in the hand.

AIBRIC

It was a fool that gave it, and may be
Out of mere wantonness to lure a sail
Among the waters that no pilot knows.

I have good pilots, Aibric. When men die
They are changed and as grey birds fly out to
sea,
And I have heard them call from wind to wind
How all that die are borne about the world
In the cold streams, and wake to their desire,
It may be, before the winds of birth have waked;
Upon clear nights they leave the upper air
And fly among the foam.

A SAILOR

(*Running from the forecastle*)

Thrust down the helm,
For I have seen a ship hid in the fog.
Look! there she lies under a flapping sail.

(*To* AIBRIC)

Give me the helm : call hither those who lie
Upon the rowers' benches underneath,
And bid them hide in shadow of the sail,
Or crowd behind the bulwark, that we seem
A trading galley in her helmsman's eyes.

(AIBRIC *goes toward the forecastle.*)

It may be now that I can go my way
And no man kill me ; for some wind has blown
A galley from the Lochlann seas ; her flag
Is folding and unfolding, and in its folds
Her raven flutters. Rob him of his food
Or be his food, I follow the grey wings,
And need no more of life till the white wings
Of Aengus' birds gleam in their apple boughs.

(*Two sailors come creeping along the right bulwark.*)

THE FOREMOST OF THE TWO SAILORS

It were better to pass by, because the gods
Make galleys out of wind that change to wind
When one has leapt on board.

THE HINDERMOST OF THE TWO SAILORS

No, for I have hope
Forgael may find his heart's desire on board
And turn his galley about and bring me home.

(*Two more sailors come creeping along the right bulwark.*)

THE FOREMOST OF THE TWO SAILORS

I swore but yesterday if the Red God
Would end this peaceful life that rots the bones,
None should escape my sword: I would send all
To mind his cows and swine by the Red Lake.

THE HINDERMOST OF THE TWO SAILORS

He has heard me and not you. Nine days ago
I promised him that none should escape my sword
But women and jugglers and players on the harp.

THE FOREMOST OF THE TWO SAILORS

He has heard me because I promised all.

(*There are sailors now along the whole bulwark and sailors in the shadow of the sail.*)

FORGAEL

Bend lower lest your battle-axes glimmer.
The tide narrows between, and one old man
Nods by the helm, and nearer to the sail
A woman lies among embroideries.
Near by, but in the shadow of the sail,
A boy and girl hold one another's hands;
Their hair mingles on some stringed instrument,
And a string murmurs as though Time were dead

Or a god hid them under the shadow of wings.
Beyond the sail a man with a red crown
Leans on his elbows, gazing at the sea.

When you are aboard the Lochlann galley, lash
Bulwark to bulwark, and square her sail by ours.
Now rush upon her and find out what prey
Best pleases you.

(*The sailors climb over the bulwarks beyond the sail.* FORGAEL *is left alone.*)

A VOICE ON THE OTHER SHIP

Armed men have come upon us.

ANOTHER VOICE

Wake all below.

A MORE DISTANT VOICE

Why have you broken our sleep?

THE FIRST VOICE

Armed men have come upon us. O! I am slain!

(*There is a sound of fighting.*)

FORGAEL

A grey bird has flown by. He has flown upward.
He hovers above the mast and waits his kind;
When all gather they will fly upon their way.
I shall find out if I have lost my way
Among these misty waters. Two! Now four!
Now four together! I shall hear their words
If I go nearer to the windward side,
For there are sudden voices in my ears.

(*He goes to the right bulwark.*)

Two hover there together, and one says,
'How light we are now we are changed to birds!'
And the other answers, 'Maybe we shall find

Our hearts' desire now that we are so light,'
And then one asks another how he died,
And says, 'A sword-blade pierced me in my sleep.'
And now they all wheel suddenly and fly
To the other side and higher in the air.

(*He crosses over to the other bulwark.*)

They are still waiting; and now the laggard comes,
And she cries out, 'I have fled to my beloved
In the waste air. I will wander by his side
Among the windy meadows of the dawn.'
They have flown away together. We are nearly
A quarter of the heavens from our right way.

(*He goes to the steering-oar. Two sailors come from the other ship dragging a long rope, which they fasten to the mast.*)

ONE OF THE SAILORS

But will it hold while we are emptying her?

While the wind is light.

FORGAEL

The oar can hardly move her,
And I must lose more time because these fools
Believe that gold and women taken in war
Are better than the woods where no love fades
From its first sighs and laughter, before the sleep,
Whose shadow is the sleep that comes with love,
Ends all things.

(*More sailors have come from the other ship. One of them carries a crown of gold and of rubies. One of them leads* DECTORA, *who has a rose embroidered over her breast.*)

AN OLD SAILOR

I have slain the Lochlann king.

FORGAEL

You have done well, because my bows are turned
Towards a country where there are no kings.

A SAILOR

(*Laying the crown at* FORGAEL'S *feet*)

I have brought his crown.

THE OLD SAILOR

And I have brought his queen.
I would have spared her handmaid, but she caught
This blade out of my hand and died of a sudden.

ANOTHER SAILOR

She offers great rewards if we turn east
And bring her to her kingdom and her people.

FORGAEL

My way is west. She seems both young and
shapely ;
Give her to Aibric, if he will. I wait
For an immortal woman, as I think.

(*He goes nearer to* DECTORA, *gazing at her.*)

THE OLD SAILOR

I left her living, thinking that I had found
Your heart's desire and the end of all our trouble ;
But now I will kill her.

(FORGAEL *motions him away.*)

FORGAEL

All comes to an end.
The harvest 's in ; the granary doors are shut ;
The topmost blossom on the boughs of Time
Has blossomed, and I grow as old as Time,

For I have all his garden wisdom.

O speak !

I await your words as the blind grass awaits
The falling blossoms, and the dead the living.

DECTORA

I will swear by sun and moon to pardon all
And to give wealth of oxen and sheep to all ;
And to give you besides a hundred shields,
A hundred swords, a hundred drinking-bowls.

A SAILOR

Cover your ears ; for once we had moored our
galley
Beside a Lochlann wharf, and though she had
sworn
By sun and moon and a hundred gods as well,
She would weave a net to take us.

ANOTHER SAILOR

She might keep faith :
The gods hold watch about the words of a queen.

FORGAEL

Have the winds blown you among these empty waters ?

A SAILOR

She will answer now like any waiting woman
Because these waters make all women one.

DECTORA

I and that mighty king, a sudden blow
And evil fortune have overthrown, sailed hither
Because I had hoped to come, as dreams foretold,
Where gods are brooding in a mountainous place

That murmurs with hóly woods, and win their help
To conquer among the countries of the north.
I have found nothing but these empty waters :
I have turned homewards.

FORGAEL

In the eyes of the gods,
War-laden galleys, and armies on white roads,
And unforgotten names, and the cold stars
That have built all are dust on a moth's wing.
These are their lures, but they have set their hearts
On tears and laughter ; they have lured you hither
And lured me hither, that you might be my love.
Aengus looks on you when I look : he awaits
Till his Edaine, no longer a golden fly
Among the winds, looks under your pale eyelids.

DECTORA

(*To the sailors*)

Is it your will that I, who am a queen
Among the queens, and chose the mightiest
Of the twelve kings of the world to be my king,
Become a stranger's leman ; and that you,
Who might have flocks and herds and many thralls,
Be pullers of the oar until you die?

A SAILOR

She bids us follow her.

ANOTHER SAILOR

I have grown weary
Of following Forgael's dream from wind to wind.

ANOTHER SAILOR

Give me a hundred sheep.

ANOTHER SAILOR

Give me a house
Well sheltered from the winds, and fruitful fields,
And a strong galley.

DECTORA

I give you all as much.

ANOTHER SAILOR

And will you swear never to be avenged
For those among your people that are dead?

DECTORA

I swear it, though I gladly would lie down
With one you have killed and die; for when I left
My foster-mother's garden in the south
I ceased to be a woman, being a queen.

ANOTHER SAILOR

And will you swear it by the sun and moon?

DECTORA

I swear it.

ANOTHER SAILOR

Let every man draw out his sword.
Gather about him, that the gods may not know
The hand that wounds him, because the gods are
his friends.

(FORGAEL *has taken the harp in his hands and is leaning against the bulwark. The sailors draw their swords, and come toward him.* FORGAEL *plays slowly and faintly.*)

A SAILOR

A white bird beats his wings upon my face.

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ANOTHER SAILOR

A white bird has torn me with his silver claws.

ANOTHER SAILOR

I am blind and deaf because of the white wings.

ANOTHER SAILOR

I am afraid of the harp.

ANOTHER SAILOR

O ! wings on wings !

DECTORA

He has thrown a druid dream upon the air.
Strike quickly ; it will fade out when you strike.

A SAILOR

I am afraid of his low-laughing harp.

(FORGAEL *changes the air.*)

DECTORA

(*Looking over the bulwark in a half dream*)

I shall be home now in a little while,
Hearing the harpers play, the pine-wood crackle,
The handmaids laugh and whisper in the door.

A SAILOR

Who said we had a skin of yellow ale?

ANOTHER SAILOR

I said the ale was brown.

ANOTHER SAILOR

(*Who has gone into the other ship*)

I have found the ale,
I had thrown it down behind this coil of rope.

ANOTHER SAILOR

Forgael can die to-morrow. Come to the ale.

ANOTHER SAILOR

Come to the ale ; for he can die to-morrow.

(*They go on to the other ship.*)

AIBRIC

(*Who lingers, looking at* DECTORA)

She will say something in a little while,
And I shall laugh with joy.

A VOICE ON THE OTHER SHIP

Come hither, Aibric,
And tell me a love-story while I drink.

AIBRIC

Ah, well! they are calling me—they are calling me.

(*He goes forward and into the other ship.*)

FORGAEL

How little and reedy a sound awakes a god
To cry his folding cry!

(*He changes the air again;* DECTORA *leans against the bulwark as if very sleepy, and gradually sinks down on the deck.*)

DECTORA

(*As if in sleep*)

No, no, be silent,
For I am certain somebody is dead.

FORGAEL

She has begun forgetting. When she wakes,
The years that have gone over her from the hour
When she dreamt first of love, shall flicker out
And that dream only shine before her feet.
I grew as old as Time, and she grows young

As the ageless birds of Aengus, or the birds
The white fool makes at morning out of foam ;
For love is a-weaving when a woman's heart
Grows young and a man's heart grows old in a
twinkling.

(*He changes the air.*)

Her eyelids tremble and the white foam fades ;
The stars would hurl their crowns among the foam
Were they but lifted up.

DECTORA

(*Slowly waking*)

The red hound is fled.
Why did you say that I have followed him
For these nine years? O arrow upon arrow!
My eyes are troubled by the silver arrows ;
Ah, they have pierced his heart!

(*She wakes.*)

I have slept long ;
I fought twelve battles dressed in golden armour.
I have forgot it all. How soon dreams fade !
I will drink out of the stream. The stream is gone :
Before I dropped asleep, a kingfisher
Shook the pale apple-blossom over it ;
And now the waves are crying in my ears,
And a cold wind is blowing in my hair.

FORGAEL

(*Going over to her*)

A hound that had lain hid in the red rushes
Breathed out a druid vapour, and crumbled away
The grass and the blue shadow on the stream
And the pale blossom ; but I woke instead
The winds and waters to be your home for ever ;
And overturned the demon with a sound

I had woven of the sleep that is in pools
Among great trees, and in the wings of owls,
And under lovers' eyelids.

(*He kneels and holds the harp toward her.*)

Bend your head
And lean your lips devoutly to this harp,
For he who gave it called it Aengus' harp
And said it was mightier than the sun and moon,
Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars.

(*She takes the harp in her hands and kisses it.*)

DECTORA

O, Aengus of the herds, watch over me!
I sat beside my foster-mother, and now
I am caught in woven nets of enchantment. Look!
I have wet this braid of hair with tears while asleep.

(*Standing upright again*)

He watches over none but faithful lovers.
Edaine came out of Midher's hill, and lay
Beside young Aengus in his tower of glass,
Where time is drowned in odour-laden winds
And druid moons, and murmuring of boughs,
And sleepy boughs, and boughs where apples made
Of opal and ruby and pale chrysolite
Awake unsleeping fires; and wove seven strings,
Sweet with all music, out of his long hair,
Because her hands had been made wild by love;
When Midher's wife had changed her to a fly
He made a harp with druid apple wood
That she among her winds might know he wept;
And from that hour he has watched over none
But faithful lovers.

DECTORA

(*Half rising*)

Something glitters there—

There—there—by the oar.

FORGAEL

The crown of a far country.

DECTORA

That crown was in my dreams—no, no—in a rhyme.

I know you now, beseeching hands and eyes.

I have been waiting you. A moment since

My foster-mother sang in an old rhyme

That my true-love would come in a ship of pearl

Under a silken sail and silver yard,

And bring me where the children of Aengus wind

In happy dances, under a windy moon ;

But these waste waters and wind-beaten sails

Are wiser witchcraft, for our peace awakes
In one another's arms.

(*He has taken her in his arms.*)

FORGAEL

Aengus has seen
His well-beloved through a mortal's eyes;
And she, no longer blown among the winds,
Is laughing through a mortal's eyes.

DECTORA

(*Peering out over the waters*)

O look!
A red-eared hound follows a hornless deer.
There! There! They have gone quickly, for already
The cloudy waters and the glimmering winds
Have covered them.

FORGAEL

Where did they vanish away?

DECTORA

Where the moon makes a cloudy light in the mist.

FORGAEL

(*Going to the steering-oar*)

The pale hound and the deer wander for ever
Among the winds and waters ; and when they pass
The mountain of the gods, the unappeasable gods
Cover their faces with their hair and weep.
They lure us to the streams where the world ends.

DECTORA

All dies among those streams.

FORGAEL

The fool has made
These messengers to lure men to his peace,
Where true-love wanders among the holy woods.

DECTORA

What were true-love among the rush of his streams?
The gods weave nets, and take us in their nets,
And none knows wherefore; but the heart's desire
Is this poor body that reddens and grows pale.

(*She goes toward him.*)

FORGAEL

The fool, who has made the wisdom that men write
Upon thin boards of yew and apple wood,
And all the wisdom that old images,
Made of dim gold, rave out in secret tombs,
Has told me that the undying send their eagles
To snatch alive out of the streams all lovers

That have gone thither to look for the loud streams,
Folding their hearts' desire to their glad hearts.

DECTORA

The love I know is hidden in these hands
That I would mix with yours, and in this hair
That I would shed like twilight over you.

FORGAEL

The love of all under the light of the sun
Is but brief longing, and deceiving hope,
And bodily tenderness; but love is made
Imperishable fire under the boughs
Of chrysoberyl and beryl and chrysolite,
And chrysoprase and ruby and sardonyx.

DECTORA

Where are these boughs? Where are the holy
woods

That can change love to imperishable fire?
O! I would break this net the gods have woven
Of voices and of dreams. O heart, be still!
O! why is love so crazy that it longs
To drown in its own image?

FORGAEL

Even that sleep
That comes with love, comes murmuring of an hour
When earth and heaven have been folded up;
And languors that awake in mingling hands
And mingling hair fall from the fiery boughs,
To lead us to the streams where the world ends.

(AIBRIC *and some of the sailors come from the other ship over the bulwark beyond the sail, and gather in the dimness beyond the sail.*)

A SAILOR

They are always quarrelling.

AIBRIC

Give me your swords.

A SAILOR

Eocha and Maine are always quarrelling.

ANOTHER SAILOR

Ale sets them quarrelling.

AIBRIC

Give me your swords.

A SAILOR

We will not quarrel, now that all is well,
And we go home.

ANOTHER SAILOR

Come, Aibric ; end your tale
Of golden-armed Iolan and the queen
That lives among the woods of the dark hounds.

ANOTHER SAILOR

And tell how Mananan sacked Murias
Under the waves, and took a thousand women
When the dark hounds were loosed.

ANOTHER SAILOR

Come to the ale.

(*They go into the other ship.*)

DECTORA

(*Going toward the sail*)

I have begun remembering my dreams.
I have commanded men in dreams. Beloved,
We will go call these sailors, and escape

The nets the gods have woven and our own hearts,
And, hurrying homeward, fall upon some land
And rule together under a canopy.

FORGAEL

All that know love among the winds of the world
Have found it like the froth upon the ale.

DECTORA

We will find out valleys and woods and meadows
To wander in ; you have loved many women,
It may be, and have grown weary of love.
But I am new to love.

FORGAEL

Go among these
That have known love among the winds of the world
And tell its story over their brown ale.

DECTORA

(*Going a little nearer to the sail*)

Love was not made for darkness and the winds
That blow when heaven and earth are withering,
For love is kind and happy. O come with me!
Look on this body and this heavy hair;
A stream has told me they are beautiful.
The gods hate happiness, and weave their nets
Out of their hatred.

FORGAEL

My beloved, farewell.
Seek Aibric on the Lochlann galley, and tell him
That Forgael has followed the grey birds alone,
And bid him to your country.

DECTORA

I should wander
Hither and thither and say at the high noon

How many hours to daybreak, because love
Has made my feet unsteady, and blinded me.

FORGAEL

I think that there is love in Aibric's eyes.
I know he will obey you ; and if your eyes
Should look upon his eyes with love, in the end
That would be happiest. He is a king
Among high mountains, and the mountain robbers
Have called him mighty.

DECTORA

I will follow you
Living or dying.

FORGAEL

Bid Aibric to your country,
Or go beside him to his mountain wars.

DECTORA

I will follow you.

FORGAEL

I will have none of you.
My love shakes out her hair upon the streams
Where the world ends, or runs from wind to wind
And eddy to eddy. Masters of our dreams,
Why have you cloven me with a mortal love?
Pity these weeping eyes!

DECTORA

(*Going over to him and taking the crown from before his feet*)

I will follow you.
I have cut the rope that bound this galley to ours,
And while she fades and life withers away,
I crown you with this crown.

(*She kneels beside him and puts her arms about him.*)

Bend lower, O king,

O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,

O silver fish that my two hands have taken

Out of a running stream, O morning star

Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn

Upon the misty border of the wood,—

Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,

For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

(*The harp begins to murmur of itself.*)

FORGAEL

The harp-strings have begun to cry out to the eagles.

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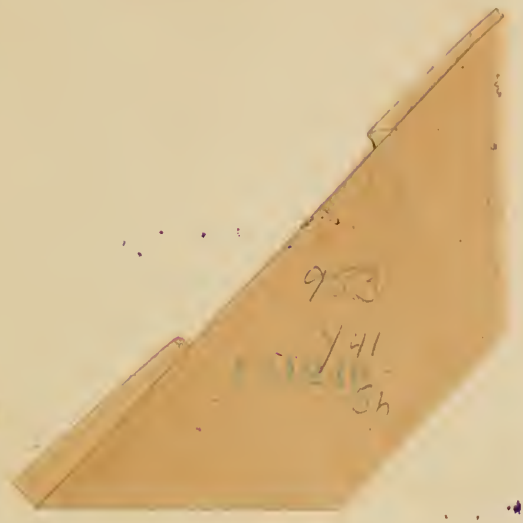
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